

Royal Statistical Society supplementary response to the House of Commons' Public Administration Select Committee first study: the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 – registration of deaths in England and Wales

1. The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) makes this supplementary submission with reference to the registration service provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. It does so to draw the committee's attention to a particular and specific concern of the Society.
2. The Royal Statistical Society is the UK's only professional and learned society devoted to the interests of statistics and statisticians. Founded in 1834, it is one of the world's most influential and prestigious statistical societies. It aims to promote public understanding of statistics and provide professional support to users of statistics and to statisticians.
3. In England and Wales, deaths must normally be registered within five days. However, if the death is referred to a coroner and subject to an inquest no registration need be made until the coroner's verdict is given. This may be months or even years later.
4. The Royal Statistical Society is concerned that in England and Wales delayed registration of deaths poses a risk to public health by potentially undermining the evidence base for public health research, policy development and monitoring of public health initiatives, all of which rely on knowing without undue delay who died and when. In particular, in the case of novel epidemics where deaths suspected as being from the novel cause may be referred to coroners, this can leave public health authorities lacking the necessary data to track any outbreak and to intervene effectively to minimise illness or death.
5. A survey conducted by Professor Sheila Bird, former vice president of the Royal Statistical Society, of heads of official statistics in 30 non-UK countries has confirmed the outlying nature of the situation in England and Wales.
6. The Royal Statistical Society therefore reaffirms its belief, as set out in its response to the Science and Technology Select Committee's Inquiry into Scientific Advice in Emergencies, that in England and Wales deaths referred to coroners should be registered in an appropriately timely manner as in Scotland.